

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394

*DHS cited in stories

Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, September 19, 2008

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

Subject	Page
Child support	2
Food Assistance*	3-5
LIHEAP	6
Medicaid	7-9
Miscellaneous	10



September 18, 2008

County sweep collects \$27,000 in unpaid child support

9/18/08 - 40 local parents were either arrested or turned themselves in for not paying thousands of dollars in child support following a sweep spanning over the past month. Livingston County Friend of the Court Melissa Scharrer tells WHMI the joint effort between her office, the Livingston County Sheriff's Department and Michigan State Police expanded from a one day to a six day effort and has produced much better results. Roughly \$27,000 was collected between the 40 parents. Scharrer says getting kids back to school in the fall is expensive and burdensome which is part of the reason for initiating the sweep. The efforts were aimed at collecting money from those parents who refuse to pay their obligations as opposed to those who are unable to pay. She says her office is always ready to work with people at developing a payment plan if their work situation changes because of the economy. (LS)

[Skip to content](#)

Bridging the gap

State food assistance aiding more students, residents purchasing groceries

By Keiara Tenant

The State News

Published: September 18, 2008

When Brandon White steps up to the register in the grocery store, he wishes he could just pay with cash, instead of a bright-orange food stamps card.

“People associate that with (someone) not being able to stand on their own two feet,” said White, a technology systems management senior. “It’s nothing against my pride. I know I can take care of myself, but the government is offering to help out college students like myself.”

The Michigan Bridge Card is a debit-like card that can be used to make food purchases at select convenience and grocery stores in the state. The state Department of Human Services, or DHS, issues the cards as part of its food-assistance program.

White is one of many college students who uses the Bridge Card to help ease some of the financial burdens of college.

As of April, 16.9 percent of individuals ages 18-25 received government assistance through the Bridge Card program.

The Bridge Card

The Bridge Card can be used only to make food purchases, with food stamps disbursed electronically once a month. The amount of assistance an individual or family receives varies based on needs, assets and expenses.

Beginning Oct. 1, a single person can receive no more than \$172 per month. The minimum amount will be \$14, according to DHS.

The Bridge Card replaced food-coupon booklets in 2000. The card allows the user more freedom to manage his or her money and eliminates the hassle of carrying a booklet.



The State News

Obtaining a bridge card

Individuals and families interested in receiving food assistance from the Department of Human Services must apply to find out if they are eligible.

The application process can take up to 30 days to complete.

The information needed to process the application includes the number of members living in the household, income, assets and expenses.

Applicants are approved for a period of one to 12 months. Then their application is reviewed to see if their financial status has changed.

The application can be found online, at www.michigan.gov/dhs, or at the Ingham County DHS office, 5303 S. Cedar St., in Lansing.

Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

The Bridge Card has helped eliminate some of the stigma associated with using government assistance, DHS spokesperson Colleen Steinman said — but many people still believe individuals and families who use the food assistance program are lazy and unmotivated.

“In fact, nearly one-third of all households that receive food assistance are working and reporting income,” Steinman said. “They simply don’t make enough money to pay all the bills.”

DHS uses an application process to determine eligibility, Steinman said. It can take up to 30 days to process but there is an emergency category for those who need it.

“We look at income, expenses, assets and other pertinent information and compare them against the specific program’s rules and policies,” Steinman said.

The application can be found online, at www.michigan.gov/dhs, or at the Ingham County DHS office, 5303 S. Cedar St. in Lansing.

Students and food assistance

In July, the DHS reported that 18 percent of all Michigan residents were receiving some form of assistance.

The state’s Food Assistance Program also set a record in July, with assistance being given to 604,863 households — representing 1,287,884 individuals.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s a student or a working adult or a senior — we want everyone who qualifies for food assistance to have it,” Steinman said. “No one should go hungry, and this is an important program that helps people supplement their nutritional needs.”

In the past five years, the number of Michigan households receiving food stamps has increased 53 percent, according to a report by WSYM Fox 47 in Lansing.

“College students need to fuel their bodies, so their brains work better — and they can use education to pull themselves out of poverty and obtain the knowledge and training they need to become successful, self-sufficient adults,” Steinman said.

White said he has used government assistance for six months.

Because he’s a student, White’s work hours were limited to 20 hours per week, with most of his income being divided between rent and other bills.

“A lot of people forget that earning a degree is a full-time job in itself — and you don’t get paid for it,” he said. “Once you’re out of the dorms, the cost of food is coming out of your pockets.”

About the Bridge Card

The Michigan Bridge Card is a debit-like card that can be used to make food purchases at select convenience and grocery stores.

Food stamps are electronically disbursed to recipients once a month through the Bridge Card.

The Bridge Card replaced food-coupon booklets in 2000. It allows the user more freedom to manage his or her money and eliminates the hassle of carrying a booklet.

Beginning Oct. 1, a single person can receive no more than \$172 per month. The minimum amount will be \$14.

Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

This reality spurred White to apply for food assistance. He was approved to receive the equivalent of \$120 per month.

“At first I thought it was too much, but then I got to shopping and saw how fast things add up,” White said. “I spent the whole thing in one trip to the grocery store and it lasted for about a month.”

Applicants are certified for a period of one to 12 months. At the end of that period, their application is reviewed to see if their financial status has changed.

Since White worked more hours during the summer, the amount of food stamps he received was reduced to \$16 monthly. He said he’s in the process of reapplying to raise his benefits.

“I can’t say I wasn’t upset but I can understand I wasn’t taking classes and I didn’t have a lot of responsibilities to worry about,” White said. “(DHS) depends on you to do some of it yourself.”

Shopping healthy

White said the Bridge Card pushes life skills and has made him a wiser shopper.

“It encouraged me to get away from fast foods — and honestly, I’ve never cooked as much as I did until I got (a card),” he said.

Michigan’s Food Stamp and Nutrition Education Program, based at MSU, can help those who haven’t learned how to shop for healthy foods by using the Bridge Card. The program is available in all 83 counties of Michigan.

The program was started with the goal of providing nutritional education to food stamp recipients, MSU program leader Karen Martin said.

Participants also learn how to stretch their food dollars, make healthy choices while shopping and learn the importance of physical activity, Martin said.

Last year, the program serviced 5,072 adults.

To get involved, students can visit Ingham County MSU Extension office, 5303 South Cedar St., in Lansing. Staff can meet with students in their home or with friends and neighbors.

“I would encourage (students) to get involved with the program because they will have research-based information to help them make informed food and physical activity choices that will promote their health and prevent the onset of disease,” Martin said.

“Most students don’t have a lot of money — and in this program they can learn how to make those choices without spending a lot of money.”

Published on Thursday, September 18, 2008



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 18, 2008

Contact: Levin Press Office: 202-228-3685
Stabenow Press Office: 202-224-4822

Stabenow, Levin Announce Over \$5.2 Million in Emergency Energy Assistance for Low-income Families, Seniors, and Persons with Disabilities

WASHINGTON —U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Carl Levin (D-MI) today announced that the state of Michigan will receive \$5,269,296 in emergency funding to help families pay the anticipated high cost of fuel this winter. The funding is being awarded as part of the Department of Health and Human Services Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps pay the cost of heating and cooling bills for millions of low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

"With energy prices skyrocketing, and families being squeezed on all sides, the need for emergency energy assistance has never been greater," said Stabenow. "Michigan families should not have to choose between putting food on the table and paying their energy bills. This announcement is welcome news and will allocate millions of emergency energy relief dollars to our most vulnerable citizens."

"LIHEAP funds provide essential assistance to families throughout Michigan who are struggling with the cost of heating their homes during cold Michigan winters," Levin said. "With the price of energy already sky-high and rising, this funding will provide welcome relief for many families in the state."

In 2008, Michigan has provided over 526,300 households with LIHEAP financial assistance. Michigan families receiving LIHEAP assistance have incomes below 110 percent of the federal poverty level. Of those individuals in Michigan receiving LIHEAP assistance, 32% are seniors, 20% are children under the age of 5, and 18% are persons with disabilities.

According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, the average cost to heat a home this winter will be about \$1,114, almost 15 percent more than last year's \$972. The cost of home heating with heating oil is projected to reach \$2,593, natural gas \$978, propane \$1,967 and electricity \$875.

The LIHEAP program is administered through HHS, under which states, territories, and tribes receive annual grants to operate home energy assistance programs for over 5 million low-income households. This money then goes to local agencies, such as the Salvation Army, to be administered.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2008

Why health care industry is sick

Elizabeth Slowik, reporter

POSTED BY GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS JOURNAL AT 12:27 PM

From underfunded Medicaid to a payment system called "perverse" by Metro Health Hospital CEO Mike Faas, health care leaders today told Regional Policy Conference attendees what is making their industry sick.

In a session moderated by Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon, Faas was joined by Spectrum Health President & CEO Rick Breon, Mercy Health Partners President & CEO Roger Spoelman and Van Andel Institute CEO David Van Andel.

Among the topics the hospital executives identified for those voting this afternoon on policy issues: Low payments from Medicaid that cost West Michigan hospitals hundreds of millions of dollars annually; term limits that boot legislators out of office just as they are beginning to understand health care issues; workforce development, such as recruitment and training; the shortages of nurses; and a system of payment that pays providers "to do something to people, not for them," as Faas put it.

The men -- including Breon, whose organization owns Priority Health, which is one of two dominant insurers in West Michigan -- said they recognize that business owners and their employees are nearing a breaking point of affordability for health insurance. Breon said he expects that many more people in the future will be sent out into the individual insurance market. He called for a thorough "vetting" of issues on any legislative reform in the insurance market. Priority Health vigorously opposed legislation proposed last year by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan to reform the individual insurance market.

"There is no plan for changing health care, and that has to change," Breon added. Opening the session was BCBSM President & CEO Daniel J. Loepp, whose nonprofit company was a major sponsor of West Michigan's first-ever policy conference.

Additional comments from this morning's session on The Business of Health Care and Life Sciences:

"This is a taxation you've not voted for which you are paying for," Breon said of the gap between Medicaid payments and the health care costs, which are passed on to employers via premium increases.

"One of the reasons we haven't had comprehensive reform in this state is term limits," Breon added.

"We need to do more coordination of all services so we can recruit and train the medical professionals this region needs," said Spoelman. Recruitment, particularly of

specialists, was a major issue in the April merger of Hackley Hospital and Mercy General Health Partners that created Mercy Health Partners, owned by Trinity Health. "We do a good job of recruitment and training, but don't do a good job of retaining."

"Without moving to universal coverage, I'm not convinced health care is going to be able to reduce costs," Faas said.

Breon defended Spectrum Health's construction binge, and said the system may spend another \$700 million over the next decade. "If you look at the actual amount of premium cost associated with all the building, it's 3 percent," he said. Faas, who presided over last year's move of Metro Health Hospital from Grand Rapids to a new \$160 million facility in Wyoming, agreed that health care costs are far more connected to the personnel than the bricks and mortar.

"One of the things we haven't done is raid each other's nurses in a bidding war," said Faas. They noted that the biggest bottleneck in educating more nurses is providing enough qualified instructors.

"We can make changes in Medicaid and you don't have to add one dollar to the system," Breon said. "Just look at who is the most efficient, who makes it work and copy those things."

Med panel says controlling health care costs is key for economy

Posted by [bbeversl](#) September 19, 2008 11:54AM



Press Photo/Jon M. BrouwerDavid Van Andel, CEO of the Van Andel Institute, takes part in a panel discussion on the Business of Health Care and Life Sciences on Friday morning at the West Michigan Regional Policy Conference at DeVos Place.

GRAND RAPIDS — Health care is an economic engine for West Michigan's economy, but it also is a significant business cost which must be contained.

That was the message health care and life sciences leaders agreed on during a panel discussion at the West Michigan Regional Policy Conference.

"You are defining this economy," Daniel Loepp, CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan told hundreds of business and political leaders. "This region has been a rare hope in a gloomy economic climate."

The health care industry employs 104,000 people in West Michigan, he said, and pays \$8.4 billion a year in salaries. He praised the Van Andel Institute, now undergoing a \$178 million expansion.

"It is phenomenal," Loepp said. "There's nothing like it in the country, and we should all be proud of it."

But Spectrum Health CEO Rick Breon cautioned that health care is only one engine driving the area's economy. The biggest "Achilles heal" for health care is the "runaway train of Medicaid," he said. He called Medicaid under-funding a "hidden tax" on all residents.

Breon and the other panelists -- Metro Health CEO Mike Faas, Van Andel Institute CEO David Van Andel and Mercy General Health Partners CEO Roger Spoelman -- called for more primary care doctors and better management of chronic illnesses to control health care costs.

Each individual also needs to take personal responsibility for their health, they agreed, by controlling their weight and not smoking or drinking to excess.

Neither John McCain's nor Barack Obama's plans adequately address the need for health-care reform, Breon said.

"We really need a long-term vision that's neither blue nor red," said Michigan State University President Lou Ann Simon, who moderated the panel.

LIVINGSTON DAILY.COM

September 19, 2008

New human services director steps in

By Kristofer Karol
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

The Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency didn't have to go far to find a new director for Livingston County services.

The nonprofit organization chose Erica Karfonta of Gleaners Community Food Bank to succeed the long-serving Catherine Rea Dunning, who recently moved to another state.

"When you start seeing that number of people coming through, you want to start helping with some of the systematic problems that are causing people to go to the pantry," Karfonta said.

Karfonta, a Howell resident, will officially take over Monday. She has spent the past seven years with Gleaners, starting off as a volunteer and, more recently, doing grassroots fundraisers and efforts for the pantry.

"We are excited to have Ms. Karfonta join our family. Her experience and passion for community improvement are just what OLHSA needs to help people and change lives," Ron Borngesser, OLHSA's chief executive officer, said in a statement.

Beverly Mostowy, OLHSA's interim director of Livingston County services, could not be reached for comment.

Karfonta said there is an increasing number of people in this economy needing help, pointing to a 10-fold increase in monthly pantry clients since she started seven years ago.

The key, she added, is letting the public know there is a need even in Livingston County.

"What we struggled with was trying to put a face on hunger," Karfonta said. "We need to put a face on who the poor is in the community and who benefits from the programs.

"If you're not friends with somebody struggling right now, it's easy for the numbers to be just another number."

Funding will also continue to be an issue for groups like OLHSA, Karfonta noted, adding she hopes her department can still be efficient.

She also hopes the community will continue to support places like OLHSA and Gleaners. Karfonta said she was unsure if anyone would take over for her at Gleaners, but did note a co-worker has become more involved with fundraising efforts.

Leaders of local groups have also been empowered to operate at the food distribution center, she added. But the focus is now on her position at OLHSA, and Karfonta is not taking it lightly.

"I think it is an honor," she said. "Catherine Rea Dunning was a spectacular leader in this community. I have some big shoes to fill."

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Kristofer Karol at (517) 552-2835 or at kkarol@gannett.com.